

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 NOUAKC 00985 021347Z  
ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 ACDA-07 USIE-00  
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00  
NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SSO-00 NSCE-00  
INRE-00 SY-05 A-01 OPR-02 OC-06 CCO-00 MCT-01  
DHA-02 EB-07 TRSE-00 USSS-00 AID-05 /121 W  
-----021355Z 093484 /40

O 021245Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 7399  
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS IMMEDIATE  
AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE  
AMEMBASSY RABAT IMMEDIATE  
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO  
AMEMBASSY DAKAR  
AMEMBASSY JIDDA  
AMEMBASSY MADRID  
USMISSION USUN NY  
CINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 0985

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, SS, MR, MO, AG

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: POLISARIO HITS ZOUERATE--AND FRENCH  
COMMUNITY

REF: (A) NOUAKCHOTT 907, (B) NOUAKCHOTT 948

1. JUST BEFORE DAWN ON MAY 1, POLISARIO ATTACK FORCE OF UNKNOWN  
SIZE STRUCK AT SNIM (MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL HOLDING  
COMPANY) IRON ORE MINING FACILITIES NEAR ZOUERATE (22 42N12 30W).  
ATTACK WAS INITIATED WITH MORTAR FIRE DIRECTED AGAINST MINING  
CENTER'S ELECTRICAL POWER CENTER AND PETROLEUM DEPOT. MORTAR  
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PAGE 02 NOUAKC 00985 021347Z

AND SMALL ARMS FIRE CONTINUED FOR APPROXIMATELY TWO HOURS AND  
LEFT POWER STATION INOPERABLE AND FUEL DEPOT BURNING. MORE IM-  
PORTANTLY, AMONG CASUALTIES OF ATTACK WERE FRENCH EXPATRIATE  
EMPLOYEE AND HIS WIFE KILLED. SIX OTHER MINING COMPANY FRENCH-  
MEN(INCLUDING ONE WIFE) PLUS ONE MAURITANIAN ARE MISSING.  
THEY ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN HOSTAGE BY WITHDRAWING POLI-  
SARIO GUERRILLAS.

2. AS NEWS OF ATTACK SPREAD AROUND NOUAKCHOTT MID-MORNING MAY 1, FRENCH AMBASSADOR, FRENCH MILITARY XEACHE, GIRM MINISTER OF STATE FOR NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY, ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF AND SNIM DIRECTOR GENERAL FLEW TO ZOUERATE VIA CHARTERED PLANE IN EFFORT TO CALM FEARS OF "BELEAGUERED" FRENCH COMMUNITY. ARRIVING IN ZOUERATE MID-AFTERNOON, THEY DECIDED TO OVERNIGHT AT CAMPSITE, APPARENTLY IN EFFORT TO DISPLAY CONFIDENCE IN GIRM ABILITY TO PROTECT MINIE WORKERS. NEVERTHELESS, BY MORNING MAY 2, ALL FRENCH DEPENDENTS (APPROXIMATELY 200) OF WORKERS AT MINIG OPERATION HAD BEEN EVACUATED BY AIRCRAFT MADE AVAILABLE BY MAURITANIAN GOVERNMENT. BY MID-AFTERNOON MAY 1, REPORTS OF ZOUERATE ATTACK HAD BECOME SO WIDESPREAD IN NOUAKCHOTT THAT GIRM FOREIGN MINISTER ORDERED INTERVIEW TO LOCAL AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE REPRESENTATIVE TO GET GIRM ACCOUNT OF ATTACK TO INTERNATIONAL MEDIA. (WORD-OF-MOUTH INFORMATION SYSTEM DESCRIBED REF B WAS SUPPLEMENTED AND REINFORCED BY BBC FRENCH-LANGUAGE NEWSCAST BEFORE SUNDOWN SUNDAY WHICH BROADCAST FULL ACCOUNT.)

3. DETAILS CONCERNING EXTENT OF DAMAGE CASUED BY POLISARIO ATTACK FORCE CONTINUE TO FILTER IN. ASIDE FROM TWO FRENCH DEAD AND SEVEN MISSING, DOZENS OF MAURITANIANS WERE INJURED 43 7)5 9\* -55ACK. IN TERMS OF MATERIAL DAMAGE, ELECTRICAL POWER STATION AT MINE WAS BADLY DAMAGED, BUT IS REPAIRABLE WITH PARTS FROM FRANCE; FUEL DEPOT WAS NEARLY COMPLETELY DESTROYED; VARIOUS HOMES AND SNIM MINIG FACILITIES WERE DESTROYED AND DAMAGED--INCLUDING 900-METER ROUESSA CONVEYOR

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PAGE 03 NOUAKC 00985 021347Z

BELT WHICH MOVES IRON ORE THROUGH TUNNEL FROM MINING AREA IN MOUNTAIN 900 METERS ABOVE CITY DOWN TO RAILGGAD LOADING YEARS. SENIOR SNIM EXPATRIATE OFFICIAL REPORTS THAT, WITH LOSS OF ROUESSA CONVEYOR BELT, ONLY ONE OF THREE ORE CONVEYOR BELTS IS CURRENTLY FUNCTIONING.

4. COMMENT: POLISARIO ATTACK ON ZOUERATE AND SNIM MINING FACILITIES IS MOST SERIOUS INCURSION INTO MAURITANIAN TERRITORY SINCE ATTACK AGAINST NOUAKCHOTT EARLY LAST JUNE; INVOLVEMENT SNIM EXPATRIATE FRENCH EMPLOYEES AS FIRST DIRECT INVOLVEMENT OF EXPATRIATES SINCE DUTCH HYDROLOGIST WAS KIDNAPPED DECEMBER 1975 BRINGS NEW DIMENSION TO SAHAR WAR (MAURITANIAN DIVISION). DESPITE EXTENSIVE DAMAGE TO SNIM FACILITIES, HOWEVER, IMPACT OF ATTACK IN THE IMMEDIATE IS PRIMARILY POLITICAL AND MILITARY. SAHARA WATCHERS WILL RECAL THAT SNIM HAS STOCKPILED MINIMUM OF THREE MONTHS SUPPLY OF IRON ORE AT NOUADHIBOU LOADING PORT, SO ORE EXPORTS AND ECONOMICALLY CRITICAL HARD CURRENCY REIPTS WILL PRESUMABLY CONTINUE. IT IS NOT CLEAR AT THIS POINT WHETHER POLISARIO TIMED ZOUERATE

RATE ATTACK TO CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL MAY DAY OR TO REAS-  
SERT ITS ABILITY TO DISRUPT LIFE IN MAURITANIA ON EVE  
OF QUARTERLY FRANCO-MAURITANIAN ECONOMIC COMMISSION  
MEETING SCHEDULED FOR THIS WEEK IN NOUAKCHOTT. WHETHER  
BREAK UP OF GOF/GIRM MEETING WAS TARGET OR WAS WINDFALL  
GAIN, FOUR DAY SESSION IS ALMOST CERTAIN CASUALTY OF  
ZOUERATE ATTACK, ACCORDING FRENCH EMBASSY. FRENCH AM-  
BASSADOR IS EXPECTED BACK IN NOUAKCHOTT EARLY AFTERNOON  
MAY 2. WE HOPE TO OBTAIN HIS FIRST-HAND APPRECIATION  
OF ATTACK AND ENSUING SITUATION (PLUS FURTHER DETAILS/  
CLARIFICATIONS) SOON.

HANDYSIDE

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
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**Disposition Date:** 22 May 2009  
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**Enclosure:** n/a  
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**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** 77 NOUAKCHOTT 907, 77 NOUAKCHOTT 948  
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**TAGS:** MOPS, PFOR, SS, MR, MO, AG, FR, POLISARIO, SNIM  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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